

Love at Gloaming

by Nova Mode

Category: Fairy Tail

Genre: Friendship, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Gray F., Natsu D.

Pairings: Gray F./Natsu D.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-12 23:55:59

Updated: 2016-04-14 00:42:03

Packaged: 2016-04-27 19:03:09

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 7,746

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Once upon a time, there was fluff everywhere, the end. For the Gratsu Fluff Week event. Rated T for mild language but that's it. Day 2: Date. Another night trapped in a cursed forest alone with a mysterious boy with dark eyes? Sounds romantic.

1. Once Upon a Smile

Thank you **Akiko Natsuko** for telling the days for the gratsu fluff week event~

I know I'm technically like two days late. But I wanna try my hand at this. Always wanted to participate in these week fests, except I never know when they start. Plus with either lots of planning or lots of time to write I'm not usually good at these things. Although given the circumstances I wrote this fairly quickly (started it last night? And finished it after I came home from work today) even if it's short, but hey I'm not perfect.

Anyways, not sure if I'll be able to do all the days (so behind already) but like I said I wanna try. Plus it might be good practice to write more on the spot.

This idea has actually been swirling in my mind for a while. In which Gray never joined fairy tail and he's sorta a bad guy (more like neutral and selfish and doesn't always do the right thing, y'know? But not completely evil). Except who knows if I'll ever make that idea into a fic...

Welp, let me know what you guys think!

Rated T: for language (sorry not sorry)

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><p>Love at Gloaming

****Episode 1****

****Once Upon a Smile ****

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"_The road to darkness is seductive, but it will only lead to loneliness and despair. And once you go down it, there is no going back."_

"Tch," Gray clicks his tongue, his bangs shadowing his face. "What is there for me to head back to?" He says to no one in particular.

He has always been alone.

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When Gray first meets the pink-haired idiot, the guy is crying rivulets of tears. Probably enough to refill the whole damn lake that he is sitting next by.

In Gray's honest opinion, it's kind of gross.

The boy, he notes, is probably around the same age as him, sixteen if not younger. Although with all the sniffing and snot it's hard to tell. Knowing how the forest works, the other kid probably has been crying here for a long time. He does seem really sad or troubled by somethingâ€|

Well it's not like he actually gives a shit. The real problem here is that this loser is trespassing on his territory! This is Gray's domain, his forest, and no one should even be able to make it in this deep. He has enchanted the whole dang area for the very purpose of not allowing anyone to even be capable of doing such a thing. The last thing he needs is for someone wandering around like a dipshit, sticking their noses where they are unwanted, and interrupting his peace.

Normally he would've kicked out anyone who got too near his area. The native folks who live in the nearby towns outside the circumference of the forest know better than to wander too deep into his domain. They even created folk tales of how his woods are enchanted or curse or whatever.

Well technicallyâ€| It's true. He did enchant this forest for his own selfish purposes but that's neither here nor there. The natives never really took great care of this land, and now the land is suddenly biting them back in the ass. Serves them right. However he does find it amusing that they even have created stories of Gray himself, believing he is some sort of guardian spirit of the forest.

Granted, they have never seen even him before. He has made sure to keep himself hidden and if he ever has to leave for business then he would make sure to conceal his presence. Plus the multitude of

transportation lacrima he owns really come in handy.

But then there is the occasional curious traveler. They hear these fantastical stories that they don't believe from the townsfolk before heading off their merry way through as if they think they are gonna be the special exception.

They never are.

Mages from many magic guilds used to come by here as well, when the enchantment was first enacted, adhering to various requests to try and lift the supposed curse. Of course they would never succeed, Gray made sure of that. There were the dark guilds too, wanting to somehow obtain the mystical power of the forest and use it for their own gain. They would also attempt setting foot on his grounds. Please, Gray had the least bit patience with those guys.

In the end, Gray had made a fine little settlement, away from civilization where he could do his work on his own without being bothered. And it has been like that for a good few years now.

That is, until this pink haired guy.

Gray has been resting on a relatively high branch that stands nearest to the lake while overlooking the boy. He remembers first finding the boy roaming around like a lost defeated soul about two days ago. But when he found him crying by his private lake, he decided he'd watch the boy as he wrenched his heart out because Gray felt bored. Except the kid has been sulking here for about two hours now. Which is really starting to get annoying. How much could a person cry?

His jaw clenches. He won't answer that question. That part of him has been lost to the darkness long ago.

In the end however, his curiosity gets the better of him. How could this boy manage to travel so deep into his woods, without getting hit with a dark curse? Not even the slightest bit of repercussions? Those who usually set foot here, are doomed to get lost in the forest, before they traverse through an unseen portal that takes them to land that is faraway. And the pollen found on the flowers ensure that their memories of this place is nothing more than a hazy dream they can never fully recall. Where do these lost souls end up, Gray doesn't know neither does he really care. All that matters is that it sends them faraway and that they don't come back.

The trick to avoiding this however is to find the way out before twilight. Should be easy because the pine trees of his forest don't grow messily nor do they tangle on themselves like he's seen more of in the south. Well there's that and also because of another special enhancement that Gray has placed over the woods—where nobody should even be able to reach the center, the lake, under any circumstances.

That is, again, until the pink haired boy. He's managed to bypass all the rules of the forest that Gray has set.

This irks Gray quite a bit.

But it certainly makes the young boy interesting. Well that and the pink hair, Gray has never really seen anything like it. A shade that

reminds Gray of the darkest tints of pink on the the flowers of his cherry blossom trees he has planted near his home. He's not accustomed to seeing people, but he knows most northerners in this area tend to have more neutral color hair, much like his own. And even though he has to been to many places across Fiore and the peninsula, pink is still a very uncommon hair color.

Or maybe Gray's just really unobservant of others, that seems like a more probable reason.

The boy beneath him lets out a shuddering breath. Ah, yes the real problem is that after two days the boy is still here, even when it shouldn't be possible. Gray was shocked when he spotted the boy again a few hours ago, running through the trees like a wild animal before stopping by the lake to have his emotional break down.

Gray looks out towards the lake and spots a familiar peak of a small mountain. He also sees the how the sun is steadily making its descent towards the horizon. Gray frowns, it's almost twilight hour and this idiot is still here. But it finally seems as though the other has calm down. Maybe they can have a little chat before he kicks the other out.

"Oi!" Gray calls, snickering when the other jumps at the unexpected noise.

"Huh?" The boy scans hastily from side to side. "Who's there?" He wipes his face with the back of his hand. Trying to remove the tears to make him look less pathetic. He continues to look around before he begins sniffing the air.

Sniffing huh?

"Up here!" Gray says, to help the poor fool out.

The other looks up when he hears the rustling of leaves as Gray adjusts himself on the branch. But almost falls back into the lake when the boy unceremoniously drops himself to a lower branch, hooking the back of his knees on it, to allow him to hang upside down in front of the other.

Gray doesn't do it very often but when he approaches others their expressions are always either wary or scared. But not the pink haired boy, he notices, instead he looks more curious.

He continues to hang there, as the other simply stares back at him. The first thing the young teen does however is readjust his scarf with care before eyeing him again with that unafraid curious look, head tilting to the side.

"Who are you?" The boy simply asks.

Gray shrugs, still upside down. "You shouldn't be asking me that."

"Huh?" The pink haired stranger blinks rapidly, caught off guard by his strange response. Well it wouldn't be as fun if he gave him normal boring responses.

And the other's confusion has Gray smirking. "This is my forest." He

calmly states. "Therefore I should be the one to ask 'who are you?'"

Before the guy in front of him can say anything else, Gray quickly interjects with a, "that!" Startling the other again, "and I should also be asking as to why you are trespassing." He ends his sentence by flicking the other on the forehead because he's within both his right and reach.

"Hey!" The boy complains, rubbing his forehead, face scrunched with irritation. "Not cool." He mutters petulantly. But when he notices the other looking at him expectantly, he decides to forgive the weird stranger in front of him this one time and instead give him a proper answer.

"My name is Natsu Dragneel." He starts with a smile, putting his hand out for the other to shake. Which he does despite still hanging down from branch by his legs. What a weird funny guy indeed, Natsu muses.

But the stranger doesn't offer a name back. Rude, Natsu immediately thinks, even after his previous impressions of the guy. But what else is to be expected when this stranger randomly shows up from out of nowhere (there's no way Natsu couldn't have notice the other boy otherwise despite him dropping down from a tree), then he demands to know who he is, and after all of that the raven haired guy in front of him won't at least have the courtesy to offer his own name?

As if reading Natsu's mind Gray sighs, pulling himself upwards before throwing himself off the branch, easily landing on his feet. His spins on his heels before he's facing Natsu once again.

"Now tell me why you're trespassing." Gray commands, and Natsu frowns at the other's tone.

"Why should I?" He stubbornly replies back, crossing his arms over his chest.

Gray looks affronted, "well it's just like I just saidâ€”_you're trespassing._" He shakes his head in disbelief, "as in you're not allowed to be here!"

"Says who?"

Gray snarls, "says me! This is my forest! Didn't the townspeople tell you to not go into the woods?"

Natsu stops at the rude boy's words, blinking not once but twice, as if he were seriously contemplating whether or not that had transpired.

"Huhâ€”I don't really know. Maybe?"

Gray face palms.

"Pfft, whatever." Natsu shrugs, "I don't see why I'm not allowed to be here."

"Did you not understand a word I just said? Are you stupid?"

"No you're stupid." Natsu spitfires back, tension growing around the two males as they glare at each other. He sees the boy with raven hair pinch the bridge of his nose, and "is he seriously counting to ten? What a drama queen, Natsu snorts.

The sound the other makes has Gray snapping his attention towards him. This idiot, Gray growls.

"Oh so I guess you just came here to cry for hours like a baby is that it?" He mocks, feeling the satisfaction grow as quickly as the embarrassed flush spreads across the face of the other boy.

"W-wha-what!?" Natsu almost shrieks. "Y-you saw that?"

Gray can't stop the haughty expression from forming. "Yeah, was surprised to find someone out here so deep in the woods. But I sure didn't expect to find out this someone was a total crybaby."

Natsu grabs at his hair and falls to his knees dramatically, "ugh, I can't believe you saw that! Why didn't you say anything earlier?" He groans.

The boy still standing before the other rolls his eyes. What a drama queen, Gray scoffs. "Wanted to see how long you were gonna keep at it. Didn't expect you to keep going for two freaking days."

"DAYS!?" Natsu shouts, horrifyingly astounded. "Impossible! I've only been here for at least a few hours." As sure as his statement is, there's something in the way that other teen in front of him appears indifferent to Natsu's dilemma, that makes him lose a touch of confidence.

"Is that what you think?" Gray darkly chuckles. "A common occurrence to fools who can't realize that this forest is enchanted."

"What?" Natsu's eyes pop out in shock. "Is that really true?"

Gray nods once. "Sure is. Whatever it was that you were so upset about is old news now." And Natsu bristles at his tactlessness..

Memories of his dearest friend with short white hair flashes through his mind, her kind disposition, her tinkling laughter... His heart breaks a little more. "No it's not! You don't know anything!" He yells emotionally.

"Please don't tell me you're gonna cry again." Gray sighs, throwing his hands up dismissively.

Natsu glares up at him, small tears forming at the corners of his eyes. "Shut up!" He barks at the towering boy.

"Tch." The raven haired teen looks unimpressed. "Whatever. I don't really care about your problems. The only thing I want is for you to leave."

"Why is it such a big deal that I do?" Natsu angrily asks, standing to his full height again. Seeing the red trimmed eyes makes Gray want to punch him in the face.

"Pinky, I get it that your pea-sized brain is having a hard time trying to understand. But really, all I need is for you to leave the forest. It's not a difficult concept."

"_Pinky?"_ Natsu murmurs to himself. Was he really just called that? He purses his lips, "I get _that_." He says, annoyed. This rude and rightful jerk is really starting to get on his nerves. "I just don't see why it's such a big deal."

Natsu catches how the abrasive teen briefly bites his lower lips before muttering, "listen I'm doing you a favor here. You have to leave before nighttime."

But he also notices how the mysterious forest boy glances towards the lake and the horizon, where the sun is slowly setting. There's a concerned glint in the other's cold eyes that obviously wasn't there earlier. Maybe there really is a reason to be worried about leaving.

Or maybe this jerk face is just an antisocial prick.

Natsu crosses his arms defiantly. "That isn't a good enough reason for me."

Gray lets out a frustrated sound. "Seriously you can't be stuck in the woods any longer than you already have. _Especially_ after it turns dark!"

"Why? Because the forest is enchanted?" Natsu gibes. "That's so dumb!"

At the other's mockery, Gray snarls, hints of dark rage brewing from beneath his fair facade. He tears at his hair and yells. "Ugh! This place is cursed you dumbass!"

"CURSED!?" Natsu exclaims obnoxiously. "Really?! Why?! How?!"

With Natsu's incessant questioning and Gray having lost all patience, he admittedly shouts, "because _I _cursed it!"

Natsu, again, is stopped by the other's words. "Why would you do that?" He asks seriously.

And Gray is left dumbfounded by the question. It's not one that he normally gets asked (not that anyone could ever get the chance to), considering the fact he makes his private mission to avoid as much human contact as possible. What else could he possibly say?

He clicks his tongue in annoyance, trying not to let the other see that his question has bothered him. "It's to prevent nuisances like you from bothering and interrupting my work."

"Well that's stupid." Natsu eventually remarks.

"You're stupid." Gray immediately bites back. But blushes in mortified shame for mimicking Pinky's earlier immature comeback.

Natsu ignores the childish jab, instead he struggles to keep his

mouth from twitching upwards into a grin at sight of the other guy getting so easily flustered. Forest-boy here is ridiculous but hanging around with him, the insults and banter, is kind of fun and he's different from anyone he's ever met. Sure, he is really annoying but there's just something about this reclusive weirdo that Natsu finds very endearing. And hilarious.

Gray expects the other to make fun of him, what he doesn't expect and is even more surprised is when the other starts laughing. It's loud and obnoxious much like the idiot in front of him. Yet it's also bright andâ€¦ Heartwarming? Gray feels disgusted for even associating the word with this loser. Which is why he tries his damn hardest to ignore the small twinge of something strange and unfamiliar that flits through his chest when he listens on to Pinky's laughing.

"Hehe, you're actually pretty funny. I change my mind. I like you."

For a moment Gray splutters incoherently, what a ludicrous notion! Where the hell did the abrupt mood swing come from? But Gray is the first out of the two to say anything elseâ€"a gasping, not entirely there laughterâ€" "What?"

No. Really.

He is laughing because this idiotic boy named Natsu is insane.

"I like you." Natsu says again, bits of laughter still fitting in between his words, and ever so sunnilyâ€"it sounds like summer and even his smile is beaming. "Hey, what's your name?"

Gray's breath hitches and his face feels uncomfortably warm. He doesn't know how to react and feels completely clueless. "Gray." He answers dazedly, "Gray Fullbuster." When the other boy cheers, hollering something about finally getting his name, he has to turn his gaze away when the boy's eyes begin to shimmer brightly.

Gray also has to bite down on his lower lip, hard enough to prevent the small smile that wants to stretch across his face.

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To be continued?

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><p>So yeah it's not much but I hoped you guys liked it nonetheless. And hopefully after gratsu fluff week, I can write better fluff haha.<p>

I was thinking of making all the days revolve around this setting but we'll see.

Thanks for reading!

Take care~

Nova

2. A Date at Violet Hour

A night trapped in a cursed forest alone with a mysterious boy with dark eyes? Sounds romantic.

Warnings: minor language again but not as bad as the first chapter. Unbeta'd so probably a shit ton of mistakes. Ah, well.

Notes: So I continued from the first chapter so same setting, slightly longer chapter, but I think there's even less fluff and it doesn't really follow the prompt of 'date'. There's also more information about the setting so hopefully it's not incredibly boring. I don't know, my brain is fried right now.

Anyways enjoy!

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><p>Love at Gloaming

Episode 2

A Date at Violet Hour

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><p>Previously__:_

"I like you." Natsu says again, bits of laughter still fitting in between his words, and ever so sunnilyâ€"it sounds like summer and even his smile is beaming. "Hey, what's your name?"

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"It's nice to officially meet you Gray." Says Natsu with a friendly smile. And the warmth he exudes when he says his nameâ€|

'_If only there was someone out there who could actually love you.'_

The cruel reminder sparks a vicious jolt within Gray's heart that breaks whatever trance he has fallen under. Those words were once spoken so coldly to him but never had he heard anything so honest and truthful in his life.

Natsu, unaware of Gray's internal predicament, bounces closer to the other asking excitedly, "say you wanna be friends?"

When he reaches a hand out to the other, it gets slapped away. "No." Gray coldly says. Taking a step backwards, "you don't know anything about me."

Confused, Natsu retracts his hand hesitantly. "But isn't that the fun

part of becoming friends?" He inquires with a hopeful smile. "Getting to know one another?"

"I'm not interested." Gray firmly states, slowly withdrawing in on himself.

"But don't you get lonely?"

Gray stiffens at the question. What is it with this kid asking him such troublesome things? Sure, he'll admit that from time to time the feeling of loneliness will seep deeper into him than he'd like but he always got over it by taking on a new project or visiting a new location. It's a temporary and very fixable issue.

'_The road of darkness is a lonely oneâ€|'_

Besides he's been on his own for so long, that the pain he used to feel as a child is nothing more than a dull ache now.

"I'm used to it." He intones. Voice betraying no other emotions aside from stoicism. Yet the irritating teen in front of him could still see right through it.

"Then why do you seem sad." Natsu states rather than asks, they both knowing it to be rhetorical. So it ends with an awkward silence.

"I'm not." Gray asserts a second too late and he couldn't hide the forlorn stresses from his expression. He resents Natsu a little more, when the other simply smiles sadly back at him. As if he understood everything. But that's the problem. He doesn't.

And shouldn't.

Something dark stirs within Gray, he knows it's breaking through his surface and that it's untamable. But maybe he'll use it if could even help him forget about his own problems for the time beingâ€|

"Well why don't you tell why you're sad first then." He knows he's terrible for poking at Natsu's apparently still-fresh wounds but it couldn't be helped, his own wretchedness needs to be let out. Even if he has to hurt another person.

And Gray feels worse when he's slightly appeased at the look of the other's distressed shock. "Eh-he," Natsu suddenly chuckles nervously, rubbing his neck. "Um thatâ€| You seeâ€| That isâ€|" Natsu sighs. "That isn't something easy for me to say." He answers despondently.

_Exactly, _Gray wants to point out butâ€|"Then I guess it's time for you to leave then." He says quietly instead, turning his back on the dejected teen without glancing back once. He takes a few steps further in before stopping, catching Natsu's attention. "C'mon Pinky, the sun is gonna set soon and there's a fair amount of walking. I'll show you the way so you don't get lost."

Natsu merely nods walking towards where Gray is waiting for him. He doesn't look him in the eye when he says with gratitude, "thanks." But then he pouts, grumbling, "but stop calling me Pinky."

Gray shrugs. "Suit yourself stupid."

"You're stupid."

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Their hike is mostly silent, there's the crunching of the dead leaves that both boys step on, the chirping of birds from time to time, and the buzzing of plentiful insects. All in all, one could say it is noisy but Natsu finds it very soothing. It really is nice out here; the air crisp and refreshing, the peacefulness of the surrounding nature and how full of life everything seems to be. It reminds him of the time he spent with his father, Igneel.

A part of Natsu can't believe he's actually been here for two days. It already took almost two weeks to arrive here from traveling on foot; this place is in the North, way North, it's not even considered the kingdom of Fiore anymore but the principality of Isvan. When Natsu had first heard how North this country was, he figured everything would be buried under snow. To his happy surprise it hardly was the case. Natsu can even smell how the climate is very mild and the lush vegetation around him is a testimony to that; hints of sea-salt, fresh water from mountain springs, pine and other trees, with a pleasant bonus of wild flowers.

How did a person like Gray end up here Natsu can only wonder.

"Gray?" Natsu hesitantly asks, he isn't sure if the other teen is still upset with him.

"Hm?" Is his noncommittal response.

"How long have you been here?"

There's a pause and Natsu bites his lips in worry. Gosh did he really upset the guy again? It was an innocent question!

But then Gray actually answers. "Hmm, I'm sixteen right now so about three years."

It takes Natsu a minute to process the new information. "You've been living in this forest since you were thirteen? And you're a year older than me!?" He stops walking to gape at the now confirmed older boy.

Gray looks back, eyebrow arching, "is it really that surprising?"

Natsu kicks a nearby rock, "maybe." And he's pouting again, "I was hoping we were the same age."

The other boy scoffs at the silly response. "It hardly matters, a year isn't that big of a difference."

Gray doesn't understand why his seemingly normal response has Natsu beaming a smile at him again. He huffs and keeps on walking.

"Hey Gray! Wait! _oof_ wait for me!"

Their steps fall into sync again but this time, Gray notices, Natsu has saddled up closer to him. So now they are side by side, causing the back of their hands to occasionally brush. He frowns at the contact, it's unfamiliar to him and he doesn't like it. He hates it even more that the pink-haired boy next to him doesn't seem bother by it in the least. He's fully at ease, merrily basking in the scenery around him, he's just so nonchalant over what has occurred between while Gray has goosebumps rippling up his arms.

What Gray has yet to realize however is that while Natsu has been taking in the sights, smells, and sounds all around him, his focus ultimately always end right back to Gray. He couldn't help himself, he's just so curious about who the other is.

Natsu could just see that something is off with Gray. Obviously the male in next to him is an independent guy, capable of doing things on his own, confident because of that. He also seems like the clever type, but isn't patient, with very little tolerance in dealing with others. It makes him seem standoffish, trying to remain aloof all the time. Then there's the fact that he's a loner, a recluse, with no sociable grace (which Natsu sorta found amusing).

But above all of that is how there is this sense of melancholy to Gray, a darkness that swirls within his blue eyes. Natsu doesn't really understand why but he feels that Gray would look a lot better, smiling and laughing. He suddenly feels determined to make that happen. Even if they don't become friends, Natsu would feel much better leaving this enchanted forest after finding a way to make Gray genuinely smile.

He sighs hopelessly, he hasn't a clue as to how he could go about it.

There is one thing that Natsu regrets though.

"Never got to try the fish." Natsu mutters, completely disheartened by the fact.

"Huh?" Gray turns his head back curiously.

"Oh, well my dad once brought home this fish for us to eat and it was the best tasting thing I've ever had. Heâ€| He actually was the one who told me about this forest and how in the center of it had a lake, which was where he got the fish." Natsu admitted sheepishly, "it's kind of one of the reasons as to why I came here actually hehe."

Gray's steps falter. His father? And that's how he found about this place? Perhaps there's a connection between his father's previous visit to the forest and as to why Natsu isn't as affected by the curse like he should be.

"Hey!" Natsu perks up, "maybe you've seen him!" He turns to Gray expectantly.

Gray merely shrugs. "I've come across people here from time to time, what does he look like?"

"He's a dragon."

And promptly trips over his own two feet.

"A what?!"

Natsu offers a hand which Gray hesitantly takes, but Natsu fails to notice, smiling proudly.

"Yeah! He's big and red and breathes fire. His name is Igneel."

"Igneel the dragon?" Gray dead pans.

"Yup!" Natsu chirps.

Most people would've laughed at this point, not believing a word he's said. After all dragons are rumored to be extinct, no one has seen one in centuries.

But Gray is definitely not like everybody.

"Well that certainly explains some things."

"Eh!?" Natsu's eyes widen. "You believe me?"

"Yeah." Gray agrees but then hesitates before adding, "I can see certain things..." He seems embarrassed although Natsu isn't sure as to why. "Aura sensing, I suppose. Um, but basically I can _see_ your magic." Gray explains, face turned away.

"Really?" Natsu asks, genuinely sounding impressed. "That's so cool! Oooh what's it look like?"

"Warmth." Is Gray's instant reply and he feels his cheeks burning up rapidly. He stutters quickly after, "I-I, I u-uh mean, I can sense a warmth coming from you, probably due to the nature of your magic. Fire right?"

Natsu readily nods, "yeah! I'm a fire dragon slayer!"

"Right. Well, your aura has this warm red glow, kind of like a sunset." Gray admits, cheeks tinted pink. "That's how it looks dormant though. It would probably flare and look different if you fully activated your magic."

"I see." Natsu says, looking down at his tan hands, unable to see the glow Gray mentioned. He pouts, "man wish I could do that."

Gray lightly chuckles, "it's not that great. Sometimes it gets distracting if I don't control it."

"Oh? So you can't just turn it off?" Natsu questions.

Gray runs his hand through his hair. "I sort of can?" Gray replies, unsure of his own words. He scratches his cheek, looking weary, "not really but I think it has more to do with my skills in using the ability than the actual ability itself."

"That must be freaky seeing everything like that."

Gray shakes his head. "Nah, I just might be used to it though. But it's like I said, if I control it then it becomes barely noticeable."

"Alright," Natsu nods along in understanding. "But is that it for me, just a warm glow?"

"What? Were you expecting me to say that your magic looks like a giant fire-breathing dragon?"

"Kind of. Yeah."

Gray sends him an irritated glare. "Like I said, it's dormant right now! Who knows maybe that's how it looks like fully activated. I don't know."

Natsu brightens, "you think so?" Then what Natsu thinks is a brilliant idea hits him. "Oh I know! How about we test it!" Gray has no time to interject or stop him when Natsu surges his magic out begins to flare fire all over his body.

Gray stumbles backwards, trying to get away from the heat. "Stop!" He yells lividly. He looks up and sees Natsu carefully trying to maintain the fire to stay only around himself.

"Do you see it Gray?" He asks, holding up his two fists ensnared in flames.

And see he did. Encasing Natsu, the former warm glow grew into something that looks reminiscent to a big, translucent red, fire-breathing dragon. But it looks as if it's standing over the boy in a protective manner.

How strange.

Behind him, a shadow flickers as though it's trying to creep up on and ambush the other. However before it does the brightness of Natsu's aura snuffs the shadow. Still, for a second Gray panics. What was that? Gray can think of plenty of reasons but is it really so important right now? Natsu is disrupting the forest with his magic.

Worse, Gray horrifies gravely. He could set it on _fire_.

"Dammit Natsu." He groans, preparing to stop the idiot. A strange light blue marking forms on the back of his hand, creating an intricate design as Gray jumps forwards and jabs three times at Natsu: his throat, his heart, then his stomach before settling his palm over Natsu's heart once more. The fire between Gray and Natsu soon burns into a cobalt blue before dissipating entirely.

When Gray wrenches his hand back, shaking away the small wisps of residual flame from his hand, he mutters to himself. "Shit. I didn't think dragon fire would be this hot."

Natsu on the other hand is stunned into silence. Did Gray really just stop his magic? One second everything is fine until all of sudden it feels like he is having a tug o' war match with his fire, like some sort of push and pull effect, but then he feels something completely

foreign mix in with his fire, something far too brilliant that still has his skin buzzing to this moment. And then everything stops.

"How did you do that?" Natsu asks shakily.

Gray bites his lips, eyes downcast, "just another trick I picked up a while ago. All I did was disrupt the flow of your magic by pushing some of mine in it, whatever you're feeling is only temporary. Don't worry."

Natsu stands there, gaping at the sheepish looking teen, a definite misplaced look for the other boy given the current situation. "Dude that was insane!" He's not sure if he means to sound impressed or horrified.

"It's not that big of a deal, plus you didn't stop when I asked." He complains, hands settling on his hips. "And you could've set the forest on fire you dumbass!"

Gray's sound reasoning is wholeheartedly ignored as Natsu is still tripping out over what Gray did to him. "No seriously! That'sâ€" Natsu stops midway, glancing around the area. "Wait. When did it get so dark out?"

Gray jolts forward at his statement. Finally noticing how the sky has indeed darkened, towards the west held the barest hint of orange as the sun made it below the horizon.

They were entering twilight time.

"Shit! We've got to go!" He yells in panic, grabbing Natsu's still tingling hand and pulling them forward into a sprint. And with each step they took, Natsu notices how they gained a little more speed, until they are running at an unnatural pace as if they were just gliding right through it. It's like everything in the forest is trying to help them escape faster.

Or maybe it's Gray? Just how many tricks does this guy have, Natsu wonders.

But his thoughts come to an abrupt halt along with the rest of his body. His hand lets go of Gray's and he's hurdled a few feet into the air before landing ungracefully onto the ground.

"Hey what was that foâ€" now even his words got cut off but that's only because he heard a series of howling.

"Wolves?" Natsu notes.

"Yeah, they signal that it's nighttime. We're too late." Gray answers.

Natsu shoots his attention back to Gray, "wait! What does mean?"

Gray warily meets the other's gaze. "It means you're stuck here for the night."

The dragon-slayer flops onto his back. "You've got to be kidding." Gray sighs before joining the other, except for laying down he opts

to rest his onto his palms, slightly leaning back.

"Well you still can go on ahead but I would advise against it. You're not gonna make it out as easily. The middle area works differently than the inner forest."

Natsu suddenly feels too tired. It's been a long apparently two days. "Care to explain then? Especially since I'm stuck here for one more night."

"The outer edges that borders the towns are generally safe, the enchantment of the forest only kicks in when you start going in deeper. The middle area is generally where most people get lost, which is the purpose, townsfolk usually call it the Neverend Forest because it seems like you can keep going on forever without escape."

He chuckles and there's the dark tilt to it. "But it messes with your senses, makes you see and hear things that aren't there. Certain pollen from plants and flowers will affect your mood, like make you suddenly tired, or cause you to panic. It also distorts your perception, like you with time." He chuckles again when Natsu begins to grumble. "So anyone who wanders in ends up walking around in circles for an endless amount of time."

When Natsu glances up at Gray he sees a small smile forming, but it's one of malice and it sets him on edge. "At night the forest will cast illusions that usually aren't very pleasant, it's an attempt to instill fear into the victim. The pollen can make you dizzy or nauseous, sometimes even make you sick with a fever. It becomes a completely different place after dark."

That's terrible, Natsu wants to say. Instead he blinks, looking pensive. "Is that why you warned me about not going in there?"

"Eh, I guess so." Gray admits with a shrug. "There's really no point in letting you try. You'll only end up disturbing the wildlife with the ruckus you'll probably end up making." He pauses, looks at the other briefly, before mumbling under his breath. "Plus you're somewhat an exception."

Exception? This captures Natsu's interest. "What do mean exception?"

Gray finally gives in, allowing himself to lay down next to the other. "You've been trapped here a little too long. Most only last about twenty-four hours before they are warped out of the forest." At Natsu's confused look, Gray clarifies, "another part of the curse. But those with high amounts of magic can last another day or two."

Natsu shifts over to lay on side, looking down at Gray, he can many stars reflected in the pale boy's dark eyes and he appears to have his own glow too. Natsu isn't aware at how he smiles softly at the sight. "And I'm still trapped here even though I've should've disappeared already." He finishes for the other.

"That's right." Gray stares intently up at the sky, where it has become completely dark, the millions of stars shining majestically in the sky. "And you reached the lake when no one should be able to." He

tries hard to ignore the piercing, curious stare from Natsu, pursing his lips at the awkwardness. "If anyone got to inner forest they immediately would've been warped out. Yet there you were at the lake, _crying_." He smirks when Natsu barks an indignant, "hey!"

"I think it might have something to do with your father." Gray hypothesizes.

"Huh?" Natsu ceases his complaining at the mention of his dad. "What do you mean?"

Gray readjusts, placing his hands under his head. "I can assume that since you're a dragon slayer and your father's a dragon, you learned your magic from him, yeah?"

"Yeah that's right."

Gray contemplates a few more seconds before answering, "I think their might be a connection between this forest and your father that perhaps has affected you. But that's just my guess."

"Oh," Natsu says softly, "yeah maybe."

Hearing Natsu's desolate tone has Gray furrowing his eyebrows. Hopefully he won't regret his question. "You said your father told you about this place. Where is he now?"

"He left years ago for some reason. I don't know where he is." Natsu sounds so pathetically sad as he tells Gray.

A cold feeling washes through Gray. His eyes harden. "It happens." Is all he says. Happens way too often, he wants to add but decides not to, knowing it will probably upset the pink-haired boy.

"The day before Igneel left was the day he brought me the fish from this forest." He confesses. "And I don't know, I guess I've just been missing him a lot recently that it made me want to come and try it again."

Gray remains quiet and impassive as he prepares himself for the likely follow up question from the other.

"What about your parents? You live alone, don'cha?"

"My mother was killed many years ago." He answers with no inflection in his voice. "My fatherâ€¦ I have no idea, he could be dead for all I care." The second response is filled with bitterness and no remorse.

"Grayâ€¦" Natsu tries to start.

"As much as our little date has been fun." Gray interrupts, he isn't gonna let Natsu remind him of things he didn't need to remember. He pulls himself up into a sitting position, stretching his arms over his head. "It's about time I head home." He stands up and Natsu panics at the sight of his already retreating form.

"Wait!" Natsu calls out, jumping up and leaping after the other. "Aren't you gonna invite me over for dinner?"

Gray stops and turns back, incredulous by the boy's absurdity. What audacity! "Why would I do that? I don't want you anywhere near my house!"

Natsu nibbles his lower lip, poking his index fingers together. "You should always take your date out to dinnerâ€"or was it to get strawberry cake?â€" I don't remember but I think what Erza meant was that you should always offer your date food!"

Gray stands there dumbfounded. Seriously this guy is such an insufferable idiot. "Okay first off," he raises his hand with only his index finger sticking out, "who the hell is Erza?" He proceeds to put out his middle finger to show off along with his index. "_Second_" he stresses irritably, his cheeks warming up uncomfortably again, "I was only joking about the date thing." He mumbles almost inaudibly. He's glad though, that it's too dark out for the other to notice his pink cheeks even with the stars and moon providing light.

Natsu chuckles bashfully. "Oh, Erza is a friend of mine, I guess you can say, from my guild." Gray quirks an eyebrow at that.

"You guess."

"Ehuh... She's more like my rival even if she's always beating me up." He reveals with little to no shame.

"Wow," Gray says, but his tone is very flat, "sounds like a blast."

If Natsu noticed that Gray was being sarcastic he didn't show it, "yup! But I plan to beat her one of these days." When he fists pumps the air, Gray definitely knows that the idiot did not pick up on his sarcasm.

Unsurprisingly, Gray didn't care. "Whatever. I'm leaving." He turns again to leave the other.

Natsu follows closely behind. "Am I coming too?" He asks hopefully.

"No!"

"Awww, c'mon. Please?"

Gray whips back and glares at the dragon-boy, snarling. "Why shouldâ€" He gets cut off by the loud rumbling of other teen's stomach.

"Hehe," Natsu laughs sheepishly, rubbing the back of his head. "Sorry. I'm just so hungry considering I've technically haven't eaten in two days."

Gray again is left speechless by the boy in front, "uhhâ€" He's not sure what to say since he's partially to blame as to why Natsu hasn't eaten in so long. He takes a moment to consider his options before sighing in defeat.

"Fine. You can come over and spend the night at my house." His eye twitches at the Natsu's loud exclamation of "really!?" Gray grunts,

"You can have dinner, a bath, and somewhere to sleep but tomorrow bright and early I want you gone."

But it appears Natsu had tuned him out to cheer happily, "yay! Dinner date at Gray's!" Before running up to the raven-haired teen and throwing his arms around him in a hug, squeezing him tightly.

Gray squawks, feeling warm and flustered all over again (how does this fire-freak do this?). He shrills out, his voice cracking at the last wordâ€"

"It's not a _date_!"

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To be continued?

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><p>I'm hoping to write out the next day, by the end of today, but it most likely will not happen D: it might be a short chapter too. Ahhh, I just wanna catch up!<p>

I hope you guys liked it regardless. Let me know what you think!

Thanks for reading and take care!

Nova

End
file.